MARCOS ANDRÉ GLEIZER
Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
mgleizer@globo.com

SPINOZA ON METAPHYSICAL DOUBT AND THE "CARTESIAN CIRCLE"

abstract

This article offers an analysis and defense of the solution proposed by Spinoza to the "Cartesian circle" problem. Taking into consideration Spinoza's sound analysis of the epistemic conditions of an authentic doubt, it will try to show, against the interpreters who maintain that Spinoza's most explicit and consistent solution fails, that his solution offers a perfectly coherent account of the self-justification of the objective value of reason. I will also briefly indicate the intimate connection existing between Spinoza's solution to the "Cartesian circle" problem and his conception of truth as its own standard

keywords

Spinoza, Descartes, metaphysical doubt, definition of truth, criterion of truth, self-justification

Phenomenology and Mind, n. 15 - 2018, pp. 176-193
DOI: 10.13128/Phe_Mi-24980
Web: www.fupress.net/index.php/pam

ISSN 2280-7853 (print) - ISSN 2239-4028 (on line)

My aim in this paper is to analyze the solution proposed by Spinoza to the problem traditionally known as the "Cartesian circle". Arnauld, in his *Fourth Objections* to Descartes' *Metaphysical Meditations*, formulated this problem in the following way:

> We are sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists. But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Hence, before we can be sure that God exists, we ought to be able to be sure that whatever we perceive clearly and evidently is true. (AT VII 214)

1. Significance of the problem

Once we consider that the set of things that we conceive clearly and distinctly contains the set of rational ideas and principles, the philosophical problem involved in the "Cartesian circle" problem takes the form of the following question: How is it possible a self-justification of the objective value of reason? Finding a solution for this problem consists in showing that there is no vicious circle implied in such self-justification, thus clarifying its meaning and possibility. Of course, the task of legitimizing the truth claims of rational knowledge is justifiable only insofar as the skeptic challenge to such claims is taken seriously. In other words, it is necessary to justify reason only because challenging it was previously taken as possible.

2. That Spinoza dealt with this problem

Spinoza was well aware of this problem. Not only did he expound it in the Prolegomenon of his book on *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, but he dealt with it again both in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (§79) and – what is less noted and explored by his commentators – in his *Theological-Political Treatise* (chapter VI with its note).[1] The simple presence of this problem in two works where Spinoza elaborates or expounds his own philosophical thought, and not Descartes', is already a strong indication that he was not just aware of it as a "historian of Cartesian philosophy", but also that he faced it as a true problem for him as a philosopher. Now, what does a philosopher who claims that "truth is the standard both of itself and of the false" (EIIP43S, GII/124) have to say about this problem? Spinoza is generally seen as the very paradigmatic case of philosophical dogmatism found in modern times; as someone who, by affirming the identity between true ideas and certainty, would have suppressed the problem of

1 These works will be henceforth referred to as *PP*, *TdIE* and *TTP*, respectively. All emphasis in quoted sentences was added.

certainty, instead of really discussing it.[2] His absolute rationalism seems thus to be based only on an act of blind faith in the value of reason.

Spinoza's complex theory of truth certainly entails that true ideas are, through their intrinsic property, directly recognizable without the need of any sign.[3] Nevertheless, it is wrong to infer from that, that truth is immediately recognized or attained without any intellectual effort, or that no obstacles can hinder its self-manifestation. Indeed, Spinoza insists in many passages that the force of imaginative prejudices can blind our thought, hinder our apprehension of the distinction between true and false ideas, and raise doubts.[4] Moreover, the fact that true ideas contain two distinct properties (*adaequatio* and *convenientia*), whose necessary connection can only be proved when we have an adequate knowledge of God, entails that, as long as we do not possess explicitly this knowledge implicitly involved in every idea (EIIP46, GII/127), we can doubt everything.[5] Thus, even if it is true that struggling with skepticism is not Spinoza's chief philosophical concern, this does not mean that he did not recognize the relevance of this problem in his system.

It is also true that doubt does not and cannot perform any kind of methodological function in Spinoza's epistemological thought. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the state of doubt – understood as an effectively experienced mode of thought, a modality of non-true idea that prevents the full self-manifestation of truth –, does not receive from Spinoza a very precise analysis, one that explains exactly in which conditions it necessarily takes place, and how we can legitimately remove it. While investigating this, Spinoza never avoids or denies the possibility of a genuine doubt about the truth of clear and distinct ideas. He faces this radical possibility and offers a solution. My intention is to investigate this solution.

2 Cf. Hubbeling, 1967, p. 35, and Hamelin, 1984, p.102.

3 The full understanding of Spinoza's concepts of truth and certainty requires a thorough interpretation whose presentation goes beyond the scope of this paper. I developed this interpretation in Gleizer (2017), where I attempted to show that Spinoza's originality consists in suppressing the false opposition between the conceptions of truth as coherence and as correspondence. According to his theory, *adaequatio* (coherence) and *convenientia* (correspondence) are two complementary aspects necessarily involved in the concept of truth, so that, for an idea to be true, it must fulfill two conditions: be adequate and agree with its object. Adequacy, being an intrinsic property that takes part in the very definition of true ideas, also functions as what manifests their truth; not, however, as a sign, for signs are variable, arbitrary, and have no intrinsic connection with what they signify (see *TTP* chapter 2, and EIIP18S). Nevertheless, since the necessary connection between the intrinsic and the extrinsic properties constitutive of true ideas can only manifest itself when we grasp some of the consequences that follow from the adequate idea of God, as long as this idea and these consequences are nor grasped, doubt can arise.

4 See, among other passages, *TdIE* §45 (GII/17) and §47 (GII/18), *TTP* Preface (GIII/8) and chapter XV (GIII/180). Even in the *Ethics,* we find passages where Spinoza insists on this point. The most striking one is found in the scholium to the very proposition in which Spinoza establishes that truth is its own standard (EIIP43S): "for to have a true idea means nothing other than knowing a thing perfectly, or in the best way. And of course no one can doubt this *unless he thinks that* an idea is something mute, like a picture on a tablet, and not a mode of thinking, viz. the very [act of] understanding" (GII/24). The expression "unless he thinks that" introduces precisely the condition under which a doubt concerning what does it mean to have a true idea becomes possible, this condition being the presence of an imaginative belief concerning the nature of ideas.

5 See *TTP* Chapter IV: "Now since all our knowledge, and the certainty that banishes every possible doubt, depend solely on the knowledge of God – because firstly, without God nothing can be or be conceived, and secondly, everything can be called into doubt as long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God – it follows that our supreme good and perfection depends solely on the knowledge of God." (GIII/59-60)

3. On the conditions of possibility of doubt according to Spinoza

To do so, it is first required that we expose Spinoza's analysis of the conditions of possibility of doubt, as it is undertaken both in the *Ethics* and in the *TdIE*. Inverting the chronological order between these two works, let us begin by briefly recalling the main elements of the analysis proposed in the *Ethics*. This analysis can be split in two distinct moments: one negative and the other positive.

3.1. Negative moment

The negative moment consists in a detailed refutation of the foundations of the Cartesian theory of judgment and, hence, of its account of doubt and error. I shall not attempt to reconstruct Spinoza's argument here, but his critique might be synthesized in the following theses:

1.1. "In the mind there is no absolute, or free, will" (EIIP48, GII/129).
1.2. "in the mind there is no absolute faculties" (EIIP48S, GII/129).
1.3. faculties of the mind are just entities of reason (EIIP48S: "...these and similar faculties are either complete fictions or nothing but metaphysical beings, or universals...").
1.4. "in the mind there is no volition, or affirmation and negation, except that which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea" (EIIP49, GII/130). According to this important thesis, there is no difference between the act of considering a though-content and the act of giving assent to it, between the cognitive process by which a propositional content is considered and that by which this content is subsumed to a volitional act. This amount to saying that perceiving is the same as affirming something to be the case, or that propositions spontaneously take place as beliefs in the mind.

Thus,

1.5. the suspension of judgment is not an *act* of free will, through which the mind would be able to suspend assent to what is perceived by the understanding (EIIP49S, GII/134).

3.2. Positive moment: Spinoza's explanation of the suspension of judgment

The exclusion of free will renders the analysis of the epistemic conditions of doubt very precise. The human mind, understood as a 'spiritual automaton', is submitted to the necessary laws regulating the logic of mental life, laws that are not disturbed by the presence of any "absolute power of decision" that would take us out of the realm of natural causality and explanation.
Thus, the positive moment shows that, rather than being an *act*, the suspension of judgment is a passive *state* in which the mind *necessarily* finds itself whenever occurs a certain situation of conflict between *two ideas*. This state consists in a vacillation between these ideas.[6] Since every idea involves an affirmation, doubt does not consist in the suppression of the idea's affirmation, but in a *logical instability* brought about by the presence of a different and conflicting affirmation. This *logical instability* means that the mind, when in the epistemic situation of doubt, is not capable of arriving at a definite conclusion about the object of doubt. What are the characteristics of ideas that conflict in doubt? According to EIIP49S, doubt takes place when the mind "sees that it does not perceive something adequately", that is, when it

6 In EIIIP17S, Spinoza asserts that between doubt and affective vacillation there is merely a difference of degree, and not of nature: "This constitution of the mind which arises from two contrary affects is called vacillation of mind (*fluctuatio Animi*), which is therefore related to the affect as doubt is to the imagination (see EIIP44S); nor do vacillation of mind and doubt differ from one another except in degree." (GII/153)

perceives that it has an inadequate idea. The doubtful idea is thus specified as inadequate, and the conflicting idea that raises doubt is characterized as the perception of a perception, that is, as a reflective judgment.[7]

Let us turn now to the more detailed version of the analysis presented in the *TdIE*.

Here, Spinoza introduces his analysis of the *idea dubia* by way of the distinction between the merely verbal doubt and the authentic one (*vera dubitatione in mente*, §77). This distinction is a particular case of a broader distinction between what we can say and what we can think. Not only must we not confuse words and ideas, verbal affirmations and mental affirmations, but neither must we believe the former to be always expressions of the latter.[8] Merely verbal doubt is a linguistic utterance that, because it does not satisfy the conditions of an authentic doubt, does not express any thought.

According to §78, two conditions must be fulfilled if doubt is really to take place:

1. It is necessary, as in the *Ethics*, that two ideas be given: the idea of the object of doubt (idea *p*) and the idea that makes us be in doubt, that is, the reason, cause or motive of doubt (idea *q*). This means that no idea is doubtful in itself, but is rendered doubtful by its relation to another idea.[9]
2. It is necessary that the reason for doubting (idea *q*) be not clear and distinct, but confused. In Spinoza's words:

> There is no doubt in the soul, therefore, through the thing itself concerning which one doubts. That is, if there should be only one idea in the soul, then, whether it is true or false, there will be neither doubt nor certainty (...). But doubt will arise through another idea which is not so clear and distinct that we can infer from it something certain about the thing concerning which there is doubt. That is, the idea that puts us in doubt is not clear and distinct. (*TdIE* §78, GII/29-30)

According to this passage, and unlike the one quoted from the *Ethics*, there is no indication as for the character confused or not of the idea of the object of doubt (idea *q*). The possibility seems thus open for its being both confused or clear and distinct. Neither are there indications of whether the idea that throws us in doubt (idea *q*) originates from a reflective level or not. On the other hand, it is stressed that the reason for doubting is *necessarily confused*, for if it were clear and distinct, we could infer from it something certain about the object of doubt, in which case there would be no doubt. In Spinoza's words:

> Doubt is nothing but the suspension of the mind concerning some affirmation or negation, which it would affirm or deny if something did not occur to it, the ignorance of which must render its knowledge of the thing imperfect. (*TdIE* §80, GII/30)

7 However, the conflicting ideas causing doubt do not seem to have necessarily a reflective origin, for in EIIP44S, where Spinoza explains the origin of our inadequate idea of things as contingent, he offers an example of vacillation caused by a conflict of imaginative ideas coming from a pre-reflexive level.

8 On this respect, see EIIP49S, specially the following passage: "those who confuse words with the idea, or with the very affirmation the idea involves, think that they can will something contrary to what they are aware of, when they only affirm or deny with words something contrary to what they are aware of." (GII/132)

9 Descartes already noted this relational condition of doubt in the (K) item of his *Responses to the Seventh Objections:* "It should be noted that throughout he [Bourdin] treats doubt and certainty not as relations of our thought to objects, but as properties of the objects which inhere in them for all time. This means that if we have once realized that something is doubtful, it can never be rendered certain." (AT VII 473). The word 'object' here refers to mental items, such as ideas, perceptions or judgments.

The reason for doubting, therefore, is a confused, imperfect and inadequate idea, and not a certain one. In other words, doubt (and hence the skeptical position) does not presuppose certainty: its roots lie in *ignorance*.[10] Doney (1975) thus synthesizes the elements of this analysis:

> If someone claims that *p* is doubtful because it is possible that *q*, he implies that he does not know that *q* and also that he does not know that not-*q*. (p. 145).

This formulation indicates that the mere fact of considering something as possible lies in our ignorance about the cause (or reason) that necessarily posits or excludes it, and stresses also that to doubt *p*, another idea, different from *p*, is needed, namely, the idea *q*. To claim that *p* is doubtful simply because it is possible that not-*p* is not the same as offering a reason for doubt: it is merely a *gratuitous and groundless affirmation* of the possibility of not-*p*. Therefore, according to Spinoza, for every proposition *p*, if the only reason for doubting *p* is that "maybe not-*p*" (it is possible that not-*p*), then we have no reason for doubting it. Affirmation of doubt, in such case, becomes something merely verbal.

It is important to lay emphasis on the inadequate character of the reason for doubting and on its representation of things as possible. Affirming that reasons for doubt are necessarily inadequate or confused amounts to affirming that they are originated in the imagination and never in reason. This means that it is not reason that casts doubt on itself, that doubt does not spring from a disagreement between reason and itself. According to Spinoza, it is characteristic of rational knowledge to conceive things as necessary, while it is characteristic of imagination to consider them according to the modal categories of possibility and contingency. Spinoza understands these two modalities epistemically, in other words, they only express our ignorance of what renders things necessary or impossible.[11] According to the analysis of fictitious ideas proposed in the *TdIE*, imagination takes advantage of this absence of intellection to engender, through passive associations of confused ideas, its fictions, hypotheses and suppositions about the essence and existence of things. We can form fictions only insofar as we consider some object as possible, that is, while its necessity or its impossibility is unknown to us. Thus, the power of forming fictions is inversely proportional to that of understanding (*TdIE* §58, GII/22), so that, after we have intellectually grasped the necessity or impossibility of an object, we can no longer mentally ascribe some predicates to it.[12] Nevertheless, as long as this understanding has not yet happened, "we think that the things we more easily imagine are clearer to us, and think we understand what we imagine" (*TdIE* §90, GII/33). In other words, imagination, left to itself, takes itself spontaneously for a true knowledge: it is not "*index sui*". Reasons for doubting are necessarily confused, but their

10 Descartes also pointed out this aspect, emphasized by Spinoza as a *necessary* condition of doubt, in the (M) item of his *Responses to the Seventh Objections.* Against Bourdin's objection that good and strong reasons for doubting should be certain, Descartes writes: "There may be reasons which are strong enough to compel us to doubt, even though these reasons are themselves doubtful, and hence are not to be retained later on, as I have just pointed out. The reasons are strong so long as we have no others which produce certainty by removing the doubt" (AT- VII- 473-474). Both for Spinoza and Descartes, a given reason for doubting has force only insofar as contrary intellectual evidence excluding it is not present, and not by virtue of any intellectual evidence it itself might have.

11 Cf. *TdIE* §53, EIP33S1.

12 Cf. *TdIE* §53 (GII/19-20): "Here I ask, what does such an idea concern? I see that it concerns only possible, and not necessary or impossible things. ... If its necessity or impossibility, which depends on external causes, were known to us, we would have been able to feign nothing concerning it"; and *TdIE* §58 (GII/22): "after we know the nature of body, we cannot feign an infinite fly, or after we know the nature of the soul, we cannot feign that it is square, though there is nothing that cannot be put in words".

confusion is not necessarily manifest, and this accounts for their initial plausibility.
It is thus clear that an imaginative idea will work efficiently as a reason for doubting only insofar as the necessity or impossibility of what it displays "as possible" escapes us: that is, as long as there is no intellectual evidence (an apodictic apprehension) positing or excluding necessarily its object. It is only during this period of ignorance that the content of fictions, hypotheses and other kinds of imaginative ideas that drive the mind to a state of doubt can present themselves "as possible".
Since every reason for doubting is thus an inadequate, confused idea that exhibits its object under the modality of possibility, how can we remove it? In order to achieve this, it is *necessary and sufficient* that we form an adequate idea that replaces the inadequate idea that raises doubt. If we are able to do this, we will know, to go back to Doney's formulation, whether *q* is necessary or impossible, and we will either necessarily affirm or necessarily deny *q*. Thus, doubt about *p* will be excluded, for we will be able to infer from *q* something certain about *p*.
With all that in mind, let us now turn to Spinoza's exposition of the problem of the "Cartesian circle".

4. Spinoza's presentation of the problem of the "Cartesian circle"

4.1. Presentation of the objection

In the prolegomenon to *PP*, Spinoza thus presents the objection of circularity raised against Descartes:

> But before we finish, it seems we must satisfy those who make the following objection. Since God's existence does not become known to us through itself, we seem unable ever to be certain of anything (...). For we have said that everything is uncertain so long as we are ignorant of our origin, and from uncertain premises, nothing certain can be inferred. (*PP* p. 236, GI/146)

This objection is based on the following theses:
1. "God's existence does not become known to us through itself", that is, it must be an object of demonstration.
2. "Everything is uncertain so long as we are ignorant of our origin" (that is, of God's existence and veracity).
3. "From uncertain premises, nothing certain can be inferred".
Once we accept these three theses, we must infer that "we seem unable ever to be certain of anything".

4.2. Interpretation of the Cartesian Response

Having presented the objection, Spinoza goes on to expose his interpretation of the Cartesian response such as it is presented in the *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I, Article 13, in the *Responses to the Second Objections*, point 3, and in the end of the *Fifth Meditation.* According to Spinoza, Descartes' response consists in weakening the second thesis, inasmuch as, in those texts, Descartes limits the scope of doubt to remembered evidences. Present evidence is beyond doubt and requires no divine guarantee, which has to do exclusively with the science of the conclusions that can be separated from their premises (and only when they are actually so). Propositions that require no proof (first principles, axioms or common notions), and demonstrations while they are being accomplished (present evidence), being unaffected by metaphysical doubt, do not require God's guarantee. As Spinoza has it:

> From the fact that we do not yet know whether the author of our origin has perhaps created us so that we are deceived even in those things that appear most evident to us, we cannot in any way doubt the things that we understand clearly and distinctly either through themselves or through reasoning (so long, at any rate, as we attend to that

> reasoning). We can doubt only those things that we have previously demonstrated to be true, and whose memory can recur when we no longer attend to the reasons from which we deduced them and, indeed, have forgotten the reasons. (*PP* p. 236, GII/147)

Now, since Descartes admits the possibility of proving the existence of God, as long as we remain attentive to all the premises (particular present evidences) from which this conclusion derives, it is possible to know this existence with certainty.
It is not my intention to discuss here the accuracy of Spinoza's interpretation of the Cartesian solution. My aim is to analyze Spinoza's other response – the specifically spinozistic one –, which is found also in the *TdIE* §79 and the *TTP*, and in which Spinoza speaks on his own behalf. This response is presented as an alternative to the first, since this one "does not satisfy some people" (GII/147). It is noteworthy that Spinoza never states explicitly that the Cartesian response does not satisfy himself, although in other places of his work he clearly expresses his dissatisfaction with some of Descartes' demonstrations. Does he see this solution as a valid one? We shall see that this is not so.

4.3. Rejection of the Cartesian solution

Indeed, the simple fact that Spinoza presented his response as an *alternative* to the first, and not as a reconstruction of it, is enough to indicate that he shared that dissatisfaction. On the other hand, when we consider the introductory passages where Spinoza refers to the metaphysical doubt, we verify that they allude to passages of Descartes' works where the scope of doubt seems not to be limited to remembered evidences, but to include also present evidences, as well as truths that are simpler than mathematical truths.[13]
However, it is not only the references employed by Spinoza that seem to suggest his dissatisfaction with a solution that seeks to limit the scope of doubt. This is confirmed by the way the problem is presented in the *TdIE*, in the *TTP* and in the very sequence of the *PP*.
In the *TdIE*, Spinoza expresses in the following way the possibility of the metaphysical doubt:

> From this it follows that, only so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God, can we call true ideas in doubt by supposing that perhaps some deceiving God exists, who misleads us even in the things most certain (*maxime certis*). (*TdIE* §79, GII/30)

No restrictions to the scope of doubt are formulated here: there is no mention of any

13 The passages are the following:
a) Doubt concerning all things: "nevertheless he discovered a reason for doubting [mathematical truths]: for (...) deeply rooted in his mind was an old opinion, according to which there is a God who can do all things and by whom he was created such as he was. Perhaps this God had made him so that he would be deceived even about those things that seemed clearest to him" (*PP* p. 232, GI/143). This passage seems to refer to the end of the *First Meditation* where Descartes states that: "And yet firmly rooted in my mind is the long-standing opinion that there is an omnipotent God who made me the kind of creature that I am. (...) What is more, since I sometimes believe that others go astray in cases where they think they have the most perfect knowledge, *may I not similarly go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square, or in some even simpler matter, if that is imaginable*?" (AT- VII- 21). Even the simplest propositions and present evidence are here said to be within the scope of metaphysical doubt.
b) Liberation from all doubts: "For when he discovers that there is a most perfect being, (...) with whose nature being a deceiver is incompatible, then that reason for doubting which he had because he was ignorant of his cause will be removed. (...) Hence neither Mathematical truths nor any of those that seem most evident to him can be at all suspected" (*PP* p.235, GI/145). This passage seems to refer to the *Third Meditation*, where Descartes, after having placed the *cogito* along with mathematical propositions and axioms, concludes by saying that: "But, in order to remove even this slight reason for doubt [the metaphysical reason for doubt], as soon as the opportunity arises I must examine whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a deceiver. *For if I do not know this, it seems that I can never be quite certain about anything else*" (AT- VII- 36).

exemption on the part of simple propositions, common notions or present evidence. What is being stated is simply that, as long as we have no knowledge of our origin, and consider the hypothesis of a deceiving God, we can doubt "the things most certain".
Nor does Spinoza make any restriction to the scope of doubt in the *TTP*. He says, in Chapter IV:

> ...all our knowledge, and the certainty which removes every doubt, depend solely on the knowledge of God: firstly, because without God nothing can exist or be conceived; secondly, because so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God we may remain in universal doubt. (*TTP*, Ch. IV, GIII/59-60)

Finally, as the prolegomenon to *PP* goes on to show, Spinoza opposes himself to the Cartesian solution by clearly stating that the attention given to the demonstration of a proposition does not make us absolutely certain of that proposition:

> We can not be absolutely certain of anything, except our own existence, *even though we attend properly to its demonstration*, so long as we have no clear and distinct concept of God that makes us affirm that he is supremely veracious (*PP*, p. 237, GI/148)

4.4. Reason for this rejection

The passages quoted above show clearly that, for Spinoza, mere attention given to present evidence does not accord to this evidence an absolute certainty. What Spinoza seeks to call in question through the notion of "attention" is the legitimacy of assimilating *persuasion* (irresistible inclination to assent caused by the presence of evidence) to *certainty*. This is not to say that he does not acknowledge the *factual impossibility* of doubting present evidence. On the contrary, Spinoza acknowledges it inasmuch as, according to him, every idea (be it clear and distinct or mutilated and confused) involves the affirmation of its own content, that is, inasmuch as he makes no distinction between perceiving and affirming. In order to doubt, it is necessary to turn away from the idea of the object of doubt and consider the reason for doubting. Evidence can only be shaken retrospectively. As Spinoza puts it in the prolegomenon to *PP*: when we turn our minds' eyes towards the nature of the triangle, we are "compelled to infer" that its three angles are equal to two right angles; but when our mind faces the hypothesis of the deceiving God, we can cast doubt on that property. Thus**,** to doubt it is necessary to turn the mind's eyes toward the reason for doubting. Nevertheless, the *impossibility of fact*, or *psychological incapacity*, of doubting present evidence while considering it attentively is not to be confused with the *logical exclusion* of the metaphysical reason for doubting, and does not amount to establishing the *right* to know things as they are in themselves. The irresistible inclination to believe that *p* is not the same as the logical impossibility of doubting *p*. Besides, the *moment of doubt* must not engender a confusion concerning the *object of doubt*. If doubt is always retrospective, this does not mean that the object of doubt is not the value of present evidence as the criterion for truth. Therefore, as long as the movement of thought by means of which we psychologically and momentarily escape from the action of metaphysical doubt does not coincide with the movement through which the latter is logically destroyed, present evidence cannot be qualified as absolutely certain.

4.5. Exception of the Cogito

Spinoza, however, makes a noteworthy exception for the *cogito*. He not only qualifies it as *absolutely certain*, but takes it to be the very *paradigm of certainty*. In the beginning of the exposition of his response to the objection, Spinoza reminds the reader that:

> When we previously discussed the certainty and evidence of our existence, we saw that we inferred it from the fact that, wherever we turned our attention (...), we came upon

> no reason for doubting that did not by itself convince us of our existence. (*PP*, p. 236, GI/147)

Moreover, he affirms that after we have formed a clear and distinct idea of God, mathematical truths will be in the same situation as the *cogito*:

> Wherever we direct our attention in order to doubt some one of them, we shall come upon nothing from which we must not instead infer that it is most certain – as happened concerning our existence. (*PP*, p. 237, GI/148)

The *cogito* thus emerges as the paradigm of an epistemic situation in which the reasons for doubting are logically neutralized, being transformed into, or substituted by, reasons for believing. This clearly indicates the strategy of justification that Spinoza will adopt, which consists in *suppressing the obstacle that hinders us from believing in the truth of our clear and distinct ideas*. It must be stressed, however, that, if the *cogito* is taken, in that text, as the paradigm of certainty, Spinoza does not understand it as furnishing the inescapable point of departure or the sole premise from which it is possible to develop an unshakeable proof of God's existence. He clearly affirms that, in order to suppress metaphysical doubt, we just need to arrive at the clear and distinct idea of God, "however we have acquired it" (*PP*, p. 238, GI/148).[14] According to this analysis, it seems clear that Spinoza is not satisfied with the solution that tries to attack thesis (2) in order to limit its scope. As long as the fiction of a deceiving God is considered "as possible", he accepts the maximum expression of metaphysical doubt.

4.6. Analysis of the three theses

In order to move forward into the properly spinozistic response, it is necessary to examine how Spinoza sets the problem, that is, how exactly he understands the three theses enunciated above.

4.6.1. Thesis 1

The first thesis ("God's existence does not become known to us through itself") does not seem to pose any interpretive difficulty. We find, for example, the following passage in the *TTP*, Chapter VI:

> *As God's existence is not known through itself*, it must necessarily be inferred from notions so firmly and incontrovertibly true, that no power can be postulated or conceived sufficient to impugn them (*TTP*, Ch. VI, GIII/84)

14 Curiously, no exception for the *cogito* is found either in the *TdIE* §79 or in the *TTP*, and even by the end of the Prolegomenon to the *PP*, where Spinoza presents the objection of the "circle" in a syllogistic form, he concedes the major premise of this syllogism formulated in a totally general way: "we can be certain of nothing before we have a clear and distinct idea of God" (GI/149). However, Spinoza makes some implicit references to the certainty of the *cogito* in the *TdIE* (§54, GII/20, and §58, GII/22), and even uses it as a kind of last resort to refute those skeptics who, being afraid to confess that they exist if they say that they know nothing, are like "automata, completely lacking a mind" (§§47-48, GII/18). The problem, therefore, is to determine the specificity of its certainty. Although it resists the metaphysical doubt, it does not destroy the deceiving God hypothesis. As far as the *cogito* is concerned, reiteration of doubt strengthens its certainty. In this case, the metaphysical reason for doubting is neutralized by logico-pragmatic reasons, but the internal inconsistency it implicitly involves is not revealed. This is the reason why we must not say that the metaphysical doubt is *destroyed*, but only that its scope of action is limited because it comes across a specific case that *resists* it and repeatedly neutralizes its effect. We may, therefore, distinguish three modalities of neutralization of doubt: 1) present mathematical evidences only *escape* psychologically and momentarily from the action of doubt; 2) the *cogito*'s present evidence logico-pragmatically neutralizes this action, repeatedly *resisting* the assault of doubt without, however, destroying it; 3) the present evidence of the idea of God logically *destroys* the reason for doubting, liberating evidences (1) and (2) from the necessity of being constantly reactivated.

The *Ethics*, in its turn, reinforces the need of demonstrating God's existence, this demonstration being precisely the object of EIP11. Contrary to what some interpreters maintain, it is thus clear that Spinoza's solution does not consist in denying the first thesis, affirming an immediate, non-inferential access to the existence of God.[15]

4.6.2. Thesis 2: the distinction between knowing the existence of God and having a clear and distinct idea of him

As for the second thesis, we have already seen that Spinoza accepts its most radical expression *as for its scope.* There is, however, a second aspect of it that he seems to have altered. Instead of affirming that we can doubt everything *as long as we have no knowledge of God's existence and veracity*, he affirms that we can doubt everything as long as *we have no clear and distinct idea of God*:

> We can be certain of nothing – not, indeed, so long as we are ignorant of God's existence (for I have spoken nothing of this) – but as long as we do not have a clear and distinct idea of him. (*PP*, p. 238, GI/149)

Spinoza establishes here a distinction between having knowledge of God's existence and veracity and having a clear and distinct idea of God. What does this distinction mean? What is Spinoza's purpose in making it?
He does not mean to hold that knowing that a veracious God exists is not important for the problem at hand, since he clearly affirms in the *TTP* that: "We doubt God's existence, and consequently we doubt everything, so long as the idea we have of God himself is not clear and distinct, but confused." (Chapter VI, marginal note, GIII/84)
The distinction introduced by Spinoza is intended as a way of indicating the deep root from which doubt springs, namely, the absence of a clear and distinct idea of God's nature and the presence of a confused one. We can doubt clear and distinct ideas only insofar as we can doubt the necessary existence of a veracious God. Nevertheless, we can doubt this necessary existence only insofar as we do not have an adequate idea of God's essence, but only a confused one. It is only by virtue of this confused idea that we are as easily able to affirm that God exists as to affirm that he does not exist, and also to affirm that he is a deceiver as to affirm that he is not. This confused idea, displaying God as having just a *possible* existence and as being a *possible* deceiver, is thus what renders metaphysical doubt effective. As Spinoza affirms in the prolegomenon to *PP*:

15 The interpretation according to which the validity of Spinoza's solution to the "Cartesian circle" problem depends essentially on an immediate recognition of God's perfection was supported by Martha Bolton (1985, see, particularly, pp. 382-384). It is true that, in the EIP8S2, Spinoza affirms that: "if men would attend to the nature of substance, they would have no doubt at all of the truth of P7. Indeed, this proposition would be an axiom for everyone" (GII/50), and, consequently, would be a *per se nota* truth. Nevertheless, the use of the conditional and the whole passage reinforces an important point made in the *TdIE* §§43-46, according to which the presence of prejudices prevents us from following immediately the proper deductive order, hinders what is evident by itself to be immediately evident for us, and forces our mind to prepare a way to apprehend what is *per se nota*. The problem of doubt arises only insofar as we have imaginative prejudices, but we naturally have them. In this aspect, Spinoza agrees with Descartes (although he completely disagrees as for the correct method to deal with prejudices). There is, however, an important difference between them concerning knowledge of God's existence by minds already freed of prejudices. While Descartes maintains that this existence would be known *without proof* by these minds, through the mere contemplation of God's nature (see, specially, the fifth postulate (AT- IX- 126-127) and the brief commentary to the a priori proof (AT- IX- 129), both presented in the Geometrical Exposition that follows the *Second Replies*) – what amounts to deny, for them, the first thesis –, for Spinoza, when it is a question of knowing God's existence from its essence, even these minds have to prove the reality of God's definition as an absolutely infinite substance (EIdef.6), that is, since the "eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes thing, are the demonstrations themselves" (EVP23S), they need to demonstrate the consistency of this definition through the genetic construction of this concept. This is precisely what is done in the first ten propositions of the *Ethics*, thus arriving, according to the *TdIE*'s injunction, "as soon as possible" (§99, GII/36) to God's essence.

> For to someone who does not have a true idea of God (...), it is just as easy to think that his author is a deceiver as to think that he is not a deceiver. Similarly, for one who has no idea of a triangle, it is just as easy to think that its three angles are equal to two right angles, as to think that they are not. (*PP*, p. 237, GI/147)

As we saw above, for doubt to take place it is necessary that two ideas be present, and also that the idea that causes us to be in doubt be inadequate, that is, it must involve the ignorance of something that makes it imperfect, exhibiting its object under the modal categories of possibility and contingency. The deep root of metaphysical doubt is the presence of an inadequate (confused) idea of our origin.[16]
It must also be stressed that Spinoza's reformulation of the second thesis does not mean that, in order to solve the problem of the circle, it is enough to replace the *demonstration of God's existence* by a *clarification of His idea,* for what he takes as a clarification of God's idea is indeed a process brought about by way of demonstrations. As stated in the continuation of the passage from the *TTP* cited above:

> But for us to be able to conceive God's nature clearly and distinctly it is necessary for us to attend to certain very simple notions which they call common, and connect with them those which pertain to the divine nature; then for the first time it becomes evident to us that God exists necessarily and is everywhere, and at the same time that all the things we conceive involve in themselves the nature of God and are conceived through it, and finally, that all those things are true which we conceive adequately. (Ch. VI, marginal note, GIII/84)

It is manifest by this passage that *the clarification of our idea of God is a demonstrative procedure*. Forming a clear and distinct idea of God is nothing but demonstrating, with the help of common notions, what belongs to His nature (existence, omnipresence and veracity). However, if that is so, how can we be certain of the truth of this demonstration? How can we be certain that our demonstration has resulted in true knowledge of God, since we have started from uncertain premises? Indeed, we cannot presuppose the truth of the clear and distinct premises used in the demonstration without presupposing exactly what is at stake. This leads us to the third thesis ("from uncertain premises nothing certain can be inferred") and to Spinoza's solution to the "Cartesian circle" problem.

4.6.3. Thesis 3 The third thesis contains the core of the matter. Does Spinoza accept it without any exception? In the Chapter VI of the *TTP*, he seems to deny it for the specific case of the demonstration of what pertains to God's nature:

> Since God's existence is not known through itself, it must necessarily be inferred from notions whose truth is so firm and steady that no power can be or be conceived by which they could be changed. *At least they must so appear to us at the time when we*

16 Two aspects present in metaphysical doubt should be carefully distinguished. That which furnishes the *occasion* for the metaphysical doubt to arise is the application of a rational principle, namely, the principle of causality. Only when we ask ourselves for the cause or origin of our mind that doubt *can* arise. However, our ignorance of our origin is not enough for doubt to arise *effectively*: the mere absence of a clear and distinct idea of our origin is not enough to engender doubt. It is necessary to *suppose* that our origin *could* be such as to give rise to a gap between the demands of our rationality and the structure of reality. It is this *supposition* that receives its most radical figuration with the hypothesis of a deceiving God, and thus that provides the confused idea that *effectively* engenders doubt.

> *infer God's existence from them*, if we want to infer it from them beyond any chance of doubt. For if we could conceive that the notions themselves could be changed by some power, whatever in the end it was, we would doubt their truth, and consequently also doubt our conclusion, viz., God's existence, nor would we ever be able to be certain of anything. (*TTP*, Ch. VI, GIII/84)

What exactly is going on here? *Just before the moment we inferred*, from common notions, that God exists – more precisely, that a veracious God exists – it seemed we could conceive some sort of power capable of changing those notions, that is, capable of rendering them false; because then, in that epistemic situation, *we believed it was possible to conceive* a deceiving God whose function was precisely to make us suspicious about the truth of our clear and distinct ideas. Indeed, our confused idea of God exhibited this as a possibility.

However, as Spinoza has it, *at the moment we infer*, from those uncertain notions, that a veracious God exists, it becomes *impossible to conceive* the existence of a deceiving God. According to the third thesis, shouldn't this conclusion be uncertain? Spinoza's answer is no. In this case, not only the conclusion is not uncertain, but it also suppresses the reason for doubting its own premises. The very conclusion hinders us from rendering its premises uncertain.

Is Spinoza consistent in this passage? I would say he is. To blindly accept the third thesis as having an absolutely general validity is to ignore the relational nature of doubt. No idea is uncertain in itself, but is rendered uncertain by the presence of a reason for doubting it. This reason is necessarily a confused idea that is effective as a reason for doubting only insofar as no contrary intellectual evidence is given which reveals the necessity or impossibility of the content it displays "as possible". Therefore, what stands for a valid reason for doubting in a given epistemic situation may no longer be so in a different one. We also saw that, in order to suppress doubt, it is necessary and sufficient that we form an adequate idea that suppresses the inadequate one responsible for our being in doubt. The *a priori* proof of the necessary existence of a veracious God accomplishes precisely this suppression of the reason for doubting, replacing it by a reason for believing.

In effect, the only reason for doubting the truth of clear and distinct ideas is a confused idea of a deceiving God. Once we form the adequate idea of God's nature, it makes us understand *how* and *why* it is necessary to attribute existence and veracity to God, at the same time revealing to us the *contradiction contained* in the hypothesis of a deceiving God. This fiction, therefore, becomes inconceivable – or, more precisely, that which was already inconceivable, but which we wrongly believed to conceive, is finally showed to be inconceivable. The reason for doubting is thus rejected as a *Chimera*, that is, as a verbal being *lacking all meaning*.[17] Unlike the other rational demonstrations, the demonstrative movement culminating in the conclusion that a veracious God necessarily exists coincides with the movement that reveals the absurd and contradictory character involved in the skeptical hypothesis, logically excluding the only obstacle that hindered us from believing the truth of clear and distinct ideas. To demonstrate that a veracious God creates us is to demonstrate that the hypothesis of a deceiving God is contradictory, that skepticism about reason is not rational.

Thus, once we have formed a clear and distinct idea of God, this idea affects us in such a way as to make it impossible to think that God might deceive us. Therefore, just as with the

17 In his *Metaphysical Thoughts*, Spinoza defines a Chimera as "that whose nature involves an *explicit* contradiction" (Part I, chapter I, note a, GI/233), and says that it is only "a verbal being because it is neither in the intellect nor in the imagination" (Part I, chapter III, GI/241).

paradigmatic case of the *cogito*, wherever we turn the mind's eyes so as to doubt the common notions from which we began, we can find nothing more that could enable us to infer their uncertainty. This means that whoever forms a clear and distinct idea of God's nature destroys, in so doing, the only reason he had to doubt the truth of clear and distinct ideas and, *a fortiori*, to doubt the truth of the clear and distinct idea of God.

4.7. Objection 1: the clear and distinct idea of God may have been given to us by the deceiving God

It could be objected that the *necessity* in which we find ourselves, once we have formed the adequate idea of God, of conceiving him as existing and veracious, and hence the *impossibility* of conceiving the existence of a deceiving God, are nothing but *a necessity and an impossibility for us*, which might not be *a necessity and an impossibility in themselves*. This objection amounts to affirming that it is possible that the adequate idea of the veracious God (a necessary proposition that prevents us from conceiving the existence of a deceiving God) has been given to us by the deceiving God himself, being, therefore, an absolutely false idea. Indeed, no greater subtlety and malignancy could be ascribed to a deceiving God.

It is not clear at all that this objection is indeed conceivable, since it implies that we can still conceive precisely what has been shown to be inconceivable, and that we can still ascribe a meaning to the chimerical expression "deceiving God". This objection was supported by Michael Della Rocca. He claims that:

> The skeptic does not have to concede that, once we have the clear and distinct idea that God is veracious, no reason for doubt of one's clear and distinct ideas remains. The skeptic can still raise the powerful challenge: why should the world correspond to the deliverances of our most rational thorough investigation? The skeptic would still say that, for all we know, the world fails to match even the system of clear and distinct ideas that includes the distinct and clear idea that there is no deceiving God. The Spinoza of TIE §79 cannot consistently deny this skeptical claim for this claim was invited by Spinoza's own allowance in that passage that, *at the outset*, we do not know that there is no deceiver. Surely, a truly supreme deceiver could bring about the falsity of even the thorough system of clear and distinct ideas that Spinoza speaks of in TIE §79. This is a *possibility* that Spinoza is in no position to rule out.[18]

His point here seems to be that, once Spinoza provisionally endorses the skeptical reason for doubt, this endorsement will preclude him from ever legitimately removing this doubt. This amount to accepting Bourdin's position according to which what is a valid reason to doubt in a certain epistemic context should always remain valid, as if the process of conceptual clarification could not affect it.[19] However, what the production of the clear and distinct idea of God precisely does is to transform the initial epistemic situation, showing that what *seemed possible and thinkable at the outset* (due to our ignorance), involves in fact a hidden contradiction. Once that contradiction is rendered manifest through this process, *it is not*

18 *Cf.* Della Rocca (, 1994, pp. 33-34). Given the structural similarity between Spinoza's solution and Gewirth's interpretation of Descartes that Della Rocca criticizes in his article, the same point is made against the latter (pp. 23-24): "The skeptic could respond to Gewirth's interpretation of Descartes saying that: 'even if we do have a clear and distinct idea that God exists and is not a deceiver, *it still seems possible* that this idea and the other clear and distinct ideas apparently validated by it are false – for why should the world correspond to the deliverances of our most thorough rational investigations? [...] Descartes is not in a position legitimately to deny the skeptic's claim. This is because the skeptic claim is invited by Descartes himself, in particular by his allowance at the beginning of the *Third Meditation* that there may be an omnipotent deceiver".

19 See notes 9 and 10.

possible anymore to entertain the metaphysical doubt, and hence there is no more reason to doubt the absolute truth of our clear and distinct ideas. What needs to be stressed here is that the plausibility of a reason to doubt depends on its displaying its object as *prima facie* possible, but of course, not everything that seems to be possible is indeed possible.[20]

Furthermore, even supposing that objection to be acceptable, it would not constitute a reason for doubting. As we saw above, it would consist simply in affirming that *p* ("a veracious God necessarily exists") is doubtful because it is possible that not-*p* ("a deceiving God exists"), and this is nothing but a *gratuitous affirmation* (and not a reason for doubting). Just to affirm the possibility of not-*p* is not the same as exhibiting *another idea* (*idea q*) from which the possibility of this negation would follow. The rules of an authentic doubt would be thus disrespected.[21]

In short, the situation would be as follows:

1) For every proposition *p*, if the only reason for doubting *p* is that "perhaps not-*p*" (or "it is possible that not-*p*"), then there is no reason for doubting *p*.

2) For every proposition *p*, if we understand clearly and distinctly that *p*, then the only reason for doubting *p* would be that perhaps God is deceiving us.

Now, since the proposition that "a veracious God necessarily exists" was clearly and distinctly demonstrated, we must go no further than to substitute *p* for this proposition in order to verify it to be beyond any doubt.

20 Della Rocca's position is reminiscent of Frankfurt's interpretation of Descartes, although Frankfurt affirms that Descartes' argument leads to "a conclusion which *excludes the possibility* that there is a demon (or that human existence is a product of chance, or whatever)" (1978, p. 36), and that Descartes establishes that "there is no reasonable ground for doubting that reason is consistent" (1978, p. 39). Frankfurt raises the objection (without calling it a "reason to doubt") that Descartes' argument does nothing to show that the consistent system of clear and distinct ideas corresponds to reality. Since he accepts that Descartes gives an explicit account of truth as correspondence (p. 37), how can he avoid transforming this objection into an expression of the metaphysical doubt? His strategy consists in trying to show that Descartes is only concerned with the demands of certainty (understood as a rational confidence in the internal consistency of reason), and does not really care about absolute truth. Now, it seems to me that his main textual evidence in the *Second Replies* (AT- VII- 145) does not really support this dissociation between the search for certainty and the search for truth. The fourth reply taken in its entirety seems to show that the reason why we cannot believe in, or even have the least suspicion of, the absolute falsity of our clear and distinct ideas, is that, once we "became aware that God exists [...] it is *impossible* to imagine that he is a deceiver" (AT- VII- 144, l.16-20). It is this impossibility, and not Descartes' lack of interest in absolute truth, that "does not allow us to listen to anyone who makes up this kind of story" (AT- VII- 146, l.12-15). I will neither argue for this reading here, nor deal with the other support of Frankfurt's interpretation, namely, Descartes' perplexing doctrine of the creation of eternal truths. What I would like to stress is that Frankfurt's interpretation of Descartes' overall strategy for defending the consistency of reason, understood as an indirect procedure that removes reasons for doubting truths instead of proving them directly (1989, p. 228), seems to me a perfectly legitimate strategy for defending also the absolute truth of reason. Indeed, once truth is considered as being (or at least as involving) an extrinsic agreement between two distinct terms (thought and object), one of which can only be given to us through its true idea, what could count for us as a direct proof of this correspondence? How could it be possible in this case to give something stronger than an indirect proof? And if this is so, why could we not say that, once we formed the clear and distinct idea of our origin, this idea removes not only any grounds for doubting the internal consistency of reason, but also for doubting the existence of a gap between the rational system of ideas and the ultimate structure of reality? This seems to me exactly the strategy adopted by Spinoza, although, according to his theory of truth, what renders this gap impossible to conceive, namely, the idea's adequacy is itself one of the two properties constitutive of true ideas.

21 It should be noted that the distinction between an *unjustified affirmation* of the possibility that not-*p* and the exhibition of a *ground for doubting p*, that is, the effective production of an argument supporting the affirmation of the possibility of not-*p*, must be accepted by the pyrrhonic skeptic. In fact, the latter employs the principle according to which for every argument it is always possible to present an opposing, equally strong argument, and he grounds the *epokhé* exactly in this balance of forces. Therefore, in order to accomplish this balance of forces, it is not enough just to affirm the possibility of constructing a counter-argument, but it is necessary to construct it effectively.

4.8. Objection 2: it is not possible to fulfill the necessary and sufficient condition for the suppression of doubt as long as we ignore God's existence

There remains one question about the possibility of forming a clear and distinct idea of God, that is, about the possibility of *fulfilling the necessary and sufficient condition* for the suppression of doubt. The crux of the matter, as Spinoza puts it, consists in determining whether we can form this adequate idea "even though we still doubt whether the author of our nature deceives us in all things" (*PP*, p. 238, GI/148). To put it in another way: is it possible to form a clear and distinct knowledge of something while doubting the objective value of this kind of knowledge? Is certainty about the truth of clear and distinct ideas a condition for forming clear and distinct ideas?

Spinoza presents this question as the minor premise of the objection of the circle, which he reformulates and exposes as a syllogism in the end of the prolegomenon to *PP*: "we cannot have a clear and distinct idea of God so long as we do not know whether the author of our nature deceives us" (GI/149). What this premise restricts here to the clear and distinct idea of God has evidently a much greater scope than that, as indicated by Spinoza's response. The premise could be thus reformulated: we cannot have any clear and distinct ideas as long as we ignore whether the author of our nature is deceiving us. So reformulated, this premise evokes a mistake made by Mersenne in the third point of his objections to Descartes' *Meditations*, where he introduces the problem of the "atheist mathematician". He writes:

> Thirdly, you are not yet certain of the existence of God, and you say that you are not certain of anything, and *cannot know anything clearly and distinctly until you have achieved clear and certain knowledge of the existence of God*. It follows from this that you do not yet clearly and distinctly know that you are a thinking thing (...) Moreover, an atheist is clearly and distinctly aware that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles; but so far is he from supposing the existence of God that he completely denies it. (AT VII, 124-125)

Mersenne here heedlessly mistakes the proposition (a): *whoever is not certain of the existence of God cannot be certain of anything*, with the proposition (b): *whoever is not certain of the existence of God cannot know anything clearly and distinctly*. Spinoza, as well as Descartes,[22] accepts (a) but denies (b).

Indeed, it is absurd to turn absolute certainty about the truth of clear and distinct ideas into a precondition for the possibility of their acquisition. In Spinoza's view, this would amount to affirming that to know, I must first know that I know.[23] If certainty itself was a previous condition for forming clear and distinct ideas, there would never be any metaphysical doubt, since the latter presupposes nothing less than that we have clear and distinct ideas and that we can doubt their truth.

Therefore, the central aspect of the solution of the "Cartesian circle" problem lies in the possibility of forming clear and distinct ideas and rational demonstrations while ignoring our origin and doubting the truth-value of such demonstrations. As Spinoza affirms in *TdIE* §79:

> And just as we can arrive at such knowledge of the triangle, even though we may not know whether some supreme deceiver misleads us, so we can arrive at such knowledge of God, even though we may not know whether there is some supreme deceiver. Provided we have that knowledge, it will suffice, as I have said, to remove every doubt that we can have concerning clear and distinct ideas. (*TdIE* §79, GII/30)

22 Cf. *Responses to the Second Objections*, AT- IX-, p. 111.
23 Cf. *TdIE* §34, GII/14-15.

The difference between the adequate idea of the triangle and the adequate idea of God is that the demonstrative movement of the first leaves untouched the conditions allowing the emergence of the metaphysical doubt, while the second's demonstrative movement, inasmuch as it coincides with the explanation of the contradiction contained in the metaphysical reason for doubting, excludes the only possible reason for doubting our clear and distinct ideas, thus establishing absolute certainty.

5. Conclusion

To conclude I would like to briefly indicate the intimate connection that exists between Spinoza's solution to the "Cartesian circle" problem and his conception of the self-manifestation of truth (*verum index sui*). Indeed, this solution, based as it is on the logical power of the idea of the most perfect being, offers the most perfect exemplification of that self-manifestation. Spinoza's solution consists in showing that the clear and distinct idea of God logically destroys the metaphysical reason for doubting clear and distinct ideas, and that we can form it while we still doubt the objective value of these ideas. Now, according to Spinoza's theory of truth, clearness and distinctness rest on the intrinsic property that takes part in the very constitution of true ideas, namely, adequacy.[24] Adequacy, understood as the demonstrative process that shows how and why something is necessarily the case, is an integral aspect of what it means for an idea to be true, so that it is not possible for any idea to be true if it lacks this aspect. Yet, to demonstrate something as being necessarily the case is tantamount to excluding the possibility of its negation, and thus the conceivability of its denial. Thus, Spinoza's solution consists in showing that the intrinsic coherence and deductive power of our adequate idea of God, demonstrating its necessary existence and immanence to Nature, establishes the necessary connection linking *adaequatio* and *convenientia*, and renders inconceivable any gap between these two properties.[25] The self-manifestation of God's adequate idea coincides with the self-justification of the possibility of true knowledge, and with the dissolution of the darkness of metaphysical doubt. Spinoza's solution shows hence that his thesis that "truth is the standard both of itself and of false"[26] involves a perfectly consistent conception of the self-justification of the objective value of reason, and that his absolute rationalism is not grounded on an act of blind faith in this value.

REFERENCES

Beyssade, J.M. (1997). Sobre o Círculo Cartesiano. *Revista Analytica*, 2(1), 11-36;
Bolton, M. (1985). Spinoza on Cartesian Doubt. *Nous* 19(3), 379-395;
Della Rocca, M. (1994). Mental content Content and skepticism Skepticism in Descartes and Spinoza. *Studia Spinozana* 10, 19-421994;

24 See note 3. For a detailed account of Spinoza's concept of adequacy, see Gleizer (2017).[XXX]
25 Consistent with his denial of any anthropomorphic conception of God, Spinoza refuses to construe God's veracity in terms of goodness or benevolence. Already in his *Metaphysical Thoughts* (Part II, chapter IX), he affirms that: "The same conclusion is also evident from what we said above, viz. that the whole *natura naturata* is only one being. From this it follows that man is part of Nature, which must be coherent with the other parts. Accordingly, it would also follow from the simplicity of God's decree that, if God had created things in another way, he would at the same time have constituted our nature so that we would understand things just as they had been created by God" (GI/267). In the *Ethics*, this necessary coherence among man and Nature, hence, the necessary agreement between our adequate ideas and the structure of reality, will be based on Spinoza's monism, his necessitarianism, the parallelism between the attributes, the status of the human mind as a part of the infinite intellect of God, the identification of our adequate ideas with God's ideas, and the proof that all ideas in God are adequate and agree with their objects. The very clarification of the ontological status of the human mind as a finite mode of the only substance renders thus impossible to conceive it as having any ontological and epistemological isolation from the rest of Nature.
26 Cf. EIIP43S: "As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false" (GII/124).

Descartes, R. (1973). *Oeuvres Philosophiques*. F. Alquié, F. (ed.). Paris: Garnier;
Descartes, R. (1984). *Philosophical Writings*. Vols. II, ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;
Descartes, R. (1911-1912): *Philosophical Writings*. Vols. I-II, ed. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press;
Doney, W. (1975). Spinoza on Philosophical Skepticism. In: Mandelbaum, M. & Freeman, E. (Eds.). *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court;
Frankfurt, H. (1978). Descartes on the Consistency of Reason. In: Hooker, M (Ed.). *Descartes: Critical and Interpretive Essays* (pp. 26-39). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins;
Frankfurt, H. (1989). *Démons, rêveurs et fous: La defense de la raison dans les Méditations de Descartes*. Épiméthée, Paris: PUF;
Gleizer, M. (2017). *Vérité et Certitude chez Spinoza*. Paris: Classiques Garnier;
Hamelin, O. (1984). La théorie de la certitude dans Spinoza, *Les Etudes Philosophiques*, janviers-mars, 97-105, Paris: PUF;
Hubbeling, H.G. (1967). *Spinoza's Methodology*. Van Gorcun: Assen;
Spinoza, B. (1924). *Spinoza Opera*. Ed. Carl Gebhardt, 5 vols, Heildelberg: Carl Winters;
Spinoza, B. (1988:). *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, . Edited and translated by E. Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press;
Spinoza, B. (1951). *Theological-Political Treatise*. In R. H. M. Elwes (ed., tr.):, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*. New York: Dover Publications.